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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA NAME, KOSOVO STIR HEATED EXCHANGES AT
INTERNATIONAL BALKAN POLICY CONFERENCE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) Summary: Rhetoric on Balkan policy from the Macedonia name issue to Kosovo independence continues to dominate the political scene in Greece. At a high-level conference on Balkan policy, Greek Foreign Minister Bakoyiannis reiterated standard themes of Greek policy toward the Balkans, noting Greek willingness to re-engage in negotiations with Skopje over the Macedonia name issue, difficulties with recognizing Kosovo independence, and on-going problems with Turkey. DCM Countryman's reasoned speech emphasized optimism and stressed U.S. cooperative efforts with the Contact Group in the Balkans. The Russian panelist used the platform to propagate inflammatory remarks on Kosovo, while the Macedonian representative complained about his billing as Ambassador from "FYROM" and Greece's supposed efforts to force Macedonia to abandon its national identity. End Summary.

Bakoyiannis Reiterates Balkan Policy

2. (SBU) Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyiannis served as a panelist on the April 14 conference on "Defense and Security in the 21st Century: Southeast Europe, Balkans" at the Hellenic Air Force Academy. In her "no-surprises" speech, she reiterated her government's strategy in the Balkans of cultivating good neighborly relations with all its neighbors as it pursued a principled foreign policy. Speaking on the name dispute with Macedonia, she stated that a solution must be "definitive, functional and feasible in every aspect" and "based on an erga omnes, truly compound name, with a geographical qualifier," reiterating that Greece "will continue efforts in these negotiations with unflagging interest, because the security, progress and prosperity of the Balkans is a great vision." With respect to Kosovo, Bakoyiannis said Greece was "troubled" over recognizing the new state. She stressed that Greece would continue to work toward securing stability in the entire region and underlined the need for Kosovo to strengthen democratic institutions. On relations with Turkey, the Greek FM repeated that Greece supported the Turkish EU bid, yet she added that Turkey should make "...a final turn toward a peaceful settlement of any differences that exist between us, abandoning groundless claims in the Aegean and denouncing anachronistic practices of using force."

She further expressed hope that renewed efforts in Cyprus could lead to the re-unification of the island.

Russian's Inflammatory Comments

¶3. (SBU) Russian panelist Alexei Alexeyev from the Foreign Ministry in Moscow used the conference to advance inflammatory comments on Kosovo. Referring to Kosovo's independence as illegal and lacking in widespread international support, Alexeyev called for "a return to international law and solutions by the UN Security Council as soon as possible to enable a firm solution to the issue." He further asserted that the Kosovo issue threatened the stability of the Balkans and accused Kosovo of being a drug smuggling center in the Balkans, and suggested that a European police and judicial mission to Kosovo was no solution to the broader problems of peace and stability in the region.

DCM Advocates Optimism, Emphasizes Multilateralism

¶4. (SBU) DCM Countryman used the conference to promote a message of U.S. "optimism rather than pessimism" in the Balkans. In an effort to dispel myths of sinister U.S. motives and to counteract criticism of perceived U.S. unilateralism in the region, the DCM stressed that "we have worked closely with the Contact Group in order to help the United Nations to fulfill the twin tasks of Resolution 1244," adding, "all important decisions as to the policy we would follow together were taken by consensus within that group until very recently." The DCM

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also used his speech to repudiate some of the more outlandish Russian panelist's claims. On Kosovo, the DCM argued that "the alternative of doing nothing, of letting the impasse continue forever, was more likely to bring instability rather than stability to this region." Turning to the recent NATO Summit in Bucharest, he underlined NATO consensus that recognized the Republic of Macedonia's success in meeting technical criteria, the importance of the Nimetz process, and the fact that the U.S. would not replace or supplant Nimetz as the leader of the negotiations.

Macedonian Ambassador Insulted

¶5. (SBU) Macedonian Ambassador to Athens Blagoja Handziski sparked a new wave of name-issue controversy when he declared he was "insulted" at being invited to the conference as the ambassador from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Handzinski also objected to a slogan that appeared on a television display above the panel that read "Skopje after Bucharest: no more time for tears." Handziski accused Greece of pursuing a settlement that would involve his country abandoning its national identity, something which could provoke domestic and/or regional instability as his country prepared for early elections in June.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The Macedonia name issue and Kosovo independence continue to be hot topics in Greece that hijack just about every political discussion or event. FM Bakoyiannis' measured, if uncreative, remarks at the Balkan policy conference broke no new ground but showed the GoG remains ready to re-engage in the Nimetz process.

The Russian's strident tone gave little indication Moscow was interested in moving forward on Kosovo. Our message at the conference ? and at every opportunity ? remains one of guarded optimism and the importance of multilateral cooperation in the region.